

NEW CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE PLACES WELSH RUGBY AT THE FOREFRONT OF PLAYER DEVELOPMENT



MILLENNIUM STADIUM



A £4 million new WRU National Centre of Excellence which provides training and back-up facilities already being hailed as unrivalled in world rugby was officially opened on Wednesday October 28th by the First Minister, Rhodri Morgan.

From now on all international rugby players selected to represent Wales at any level will train at the same base with the best available pitches, training facilities, medical equipment, coaches and backroom personnel on hand to help them strive for excellence.

The Sports Council for Wales has invested £1.5million of National Lottery funding and the WRU provided the further £1m required to complete the project.

A high-performance "finishing school" has been created at the Vale Resort near Cardiff where every aspect of international rugby preparation is catered for.

The facility is also home to the newly formed WRU National Academy which will select high-calibre players, coaches and match officials from the men's and women's game for specialist and personal training at the highest level.

The World Cup-winning Wales Rugby Sevens Champions squad is also based at the National Centre of Excellence as a core element of the Welsh international pathway structure.

There are three outdoor full-size pitches along with external skills training zones where players can focus on scrummage and lineout technique and performance. One of the three pitches has an all weather surface and is fully floodlit to allow day or night time sessions to take place all year round. Alongside that 38 all-weather pitch is a second full size grass pitch which is also fully floodlit to TV broadcast quality standard.

The third outdoor pitch has an international match quality grass surface and is exactly the same size as the pitch at the Millennium Stadium where the senior Wales team play home test matches.

The main building at the WRU National Centre of Excellence contains two administration and training blocks, changing rooms, team rooms, a fully equipped gymnasium and an indoor artificial 3G pitch of exactly the same quality as the outdoor version.

One administration block in the building houses the senior national squad back room team of Head Coach Warren Gatland, his assistants, analysts, conditioners, physiotherapists, medical team and squad administration staff.

On the opposite side of the National Centre of Excellence, under WRU Head of Rugby Performance and Development, Joe Lydon, the Wales international pathway structure for players, coaches and match officials plus the National Academy staff are based.

The concept for the design of the building is that newly selected age grade international players enter the system through the international pathway door and aspire to reach the ultimate goal of a place in the National Squad.

It is a highly competitive training environment within which players get the most innovative support for their playing skills, conditioning and off the field development.

The senior team has been based at the Vale Resort for several years but the major new investment has transformed the facilities around their presence into a bespoke and exclusive centre of excellence purely for Welsh international rugby use.

Senior international squad players will continue to stay at the adjoining Vale Resort hotel when they are on Wales duty preparing for RBS Six Nations, Summer tours and Invesco Perpetual Series matches in future.

The £2.5 million spent to secure the National Centre of Excellence as an exclusive base with state-of-the-art facilities completes an overall spend of close to £4m which includes capital and running costs at the base before today.

The WRU is also indebted to Gerald and Stephen Leeke who have enabled the facility to be based at their Vale Resort and Spa.

WRU Group Chief Executive, Roger Lewis, said:

"I am delighted that Wales now has an international training and development facility which will be the envy of the rugby playing world.

"It has taken a tremendous amount of hard work and commitment to achieve this and the end result is a National Centre of Excellence the whole of Wales can be proud of.

"This centre represents a statement to the rest of the world that we are truly committed to the priority of creating a winning Wales team which will be the driving force to sustain our national sport for generations to come.

"This achievement shows we are fully engaged in the demands and challenges of the professional era and we in Wales are determined to compete at the very highest level of the game.

"We now have Warren Gatland heading up one of the finest coaching and backroom teams in rugby, Joe Lydon is our new Head of Rugby Performance and Development champion heading up the international pathway structure and our systems and structures have continued to be refined and reshaped.

"The creation of a National Centre of Excellence shows we understand the need to invest in talent and provide the finest support structures we can possibly offer.

"The WRU also owns and operates the home of Welsh rugby at the Millennium Stadium and in the past two years the union has delivered record financial results and invested more into the game at all levels than ever before.

"We know there are huge challenges ahead but we can face them with confidence that we have prepared properly and professionally to compete with the very best.

"Today we are looking forward to playing the New Zealand All Blacks, Samoa, Argentina and Australia in an Invesco Perpetual Autumn International series which will keep all our fans on the edge of their seats.

"Rugby defines Wales as a nation and as Group Chief Executive hold a huge responsibility to everyone who plays and supports Welsh rugby. The launch of this new National Centre of Excellence is testimony to our commitment.

"I want to thank the Sports Council for Wales and the Welsh Assembly Government for sharing our vision and closing the circle of strength and cooperation, which has made this all happen.

"Also Gerald and Stephen Leeke have been pivotal in sharing our vision and leaving no stone unturned to ensure this became a reality here today."

First Minister, Rhodri Morgan, said:

"The development of this National Centre of Excellence has been a long-held aim for the Welsh Rugby Union. Today, the Union deserves congratulations for bringing it to fruition. The Sports Council has played a vital role in this project and I would like to praise their commitment and support."

"This state-of-the-art facility will give our elite National Squads the best possible opportunity to gain an edge and win those games where an extra two or three percent is the difference between success and defeat."

"The performances of Welsh international teams at all levels over the past few years show a clear upward trend and the excellent facilities that are now in place mean that Welsh rugby fans, like me, can look forward to more of the same, and hopefully even better performances and results, by our national teams in the future as the culture of excellence that is already in place in rugby in Wales, firmly spreads its roots, grows and bears fruit. We are the Rugby World Cup Sevens champions. We want to be winning

championship pennants across the board in the world of rugby. This centre could well give us the edge. We were slow *off* the mark in embracing professionalism in rugby, but we haven't just caught up, we have overtaken other countries."

Sports Council for Wales Chair, Phil Carling, said:

"Through National Lottery funding, the Sports Council for Wales has been able to create landmark facilities throughout Wales. To achieve sporting success, coaches, athletes and teams need the right environment in which to train and hone their talents. The new national centre for excellence will join the many other lottery supported national centres such as the Velodrome in Newport, the Wales National Pool in Swansea and the national sailing centre in Plas Menai - sports where Wales and GB have seen unprecedented success. Arguably, the National Centre of Excellence is second to none and will now further Wales as a powerhouse of world rugby."

Heritage Minister, Alan Ffred Jones, said:

"This is a world-class training facility for world-class rugby teams, and I would like to congratulate the Welsh Rugby Union and the Sports Council for Wales on their vision and commitment in delivering this project. Given the success that Welsh rugby has enjoyed over the past few years, not only the performances of the senior team in recent years, but some excellent performances and results by the age-grade teams, the senior women's team and the Rugby World Cup Sevens Champion squad, this new Centre of Excellence will surely give further impetus to equalling and surpassing those performances in the future."

WRU Chairman, David Pickering, said:

"The creation of a National Centre of Excellence creates an important new chapter in the history of our national sport.

"Wales has always boasted the playing talent to compete with the best, but we know that in the modern game professional players must work tirelessly to achieve their full potential.

"We are a small nation and the level of expertise now at hand in our systems and structures will make sure that we will identify and nurture the young men and women who have the talent to be full internationals"

The new outdoor and indoor pitches at the new WRU National Centre of Excellence have been laid throughout the summer in a building and renovation project which began twelve months ago.

Today (Wednesday) the First Minister unveiled two plaques at the NCE to officially open the facility.

The first was inside the administration and training building which now becomes the new headquarters of the NCE.

The second plaque was located on a commemorative stone alongside the outdoor artificial pitch and celebrates the Sports Council for Wales' National Lottery grant awarded to the facility.

The NCE will house the training and development home for Welsh rugby coaches and match officials who will train alongside the international playing squads.

The National Academy Manager, Phil Davies, runs his new team and structure from within the heart of the NCE to create a virtual production line of talent for Welsh rugby.

The systems and structures adopted within the new base mean that all international pathway operational and support structures will align with the senior national squad to ensure a cohesive talent development system for Welsh rugby.

Until now Wales international squads, including the senior Welsh team, have trained at a variety of indoor and outdoor locations when preparing for matches and tournaments.

The Managing Director of the Vale Resort, Stephen Leake, said:

"Our ambition at the Vale Resort has been to create a world-class hospitality business that has at its very core some of the best sport and fitness facilities available anywhere in Europe.

To establish this extensive and innovative world-class facility for the WRU has taken vision and determination. The reality is that thanks to a strong and unique partnership between ourselves, the WRU and Sports Council, Wales has one of the finest rugby training facilities in the world.

"This is something that as an independent family-owned business, we are very proud to have helped achieve. It marks another major chapter in a history of more than 20 years support and investment by Leekes and The Vale into helping develop sport in Wales from grass-roots up to international level."

WRU Head of Rugby Performance and Development, Joe Lydon, said:

"This new facility compares with anything I have seen or worked at in the world game and represents a major step forward for the whole of Welsh rugby.

"We now operate to a philosophy that is player and coach centred, development driven and competition supported which will be expressed across a range of disciplines under one roof at the new centre.

"This is an aspirational environment within which every young player will know they are being given the opportunity to achieve something special with their lives.

"Nothing is now left to chance and the systems, structures and people we have in place will deliver huge benefits for the future of Welsh rugby.

"We all know the demands on skill, power, game understanding and conditioning our best players face these days and we must give them proper, professional and structured help to achieve their full potential.

"Welsh rugby boasts a proud and incredible history which is built into the spiritual fabric of the National Centre of Excellence - through respecting the past we hope to develop the future - and I am certain every player who enters those doors will walk out inspired to give of their best for Wales.

"The WRU have with the help of our performance partners developed a world class training and development facility for selected athletes, coaches and match officials. Facilities like these do not guarantee success but they provide the opportunity form which individual and collective success can be earned."

Wales Head Coach, Warren Gatland, said:

"We have now created an inspirational working environment where the coaches and players can now focus on development and match preparation.

"One of our core values is that each player holds a responsibility to the Welsh jersey and if we ask them to give their all for that we have a duty to help them as much and as professionally as we can.

"By creating this fantastic facility we are treating all our players with the utmost respect and now we can ask them to deliver their best for Wales.

"We are already enjoying the benefits of working together under one roof and at one base so we all get plenty of opportunity to engage and share ideas.

"We know the raw talent exists at all levels in Wales and the National Centre of Excellence is the right place to nurture and develop that.

"All of us in the national squad are delighted that the Welsh Rugby Union has had the vision and determination to achieve this major improvement in facilities for our international squads."

For more information or to make an enquiry on our natural turf, 3G pitch construction or any of our other services call **us on: 01865 736272**

